DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 399 485 CG 027 012

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TITLE	Career Counseling with Native Clients: Understanding the Context: ERIC Digest.
INSTITUTION	Canadian Guidance and Counselling Foundation, Ottawa (Ontario).; ERIC Clearinghouse on Counseling and Student Services, Greensboro, NC.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO	EDO-CG-95-45
PUB DATE	95
CONTRACT	R893002004
NOTE	4p.; In its: Exemplary Career Development Programs & Practices: The Best from Canada, 1995, see ED 382 900.
PUB TYPE	Information Analyses - ERIC Clearinghouse Products (071)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Canada Natives; *Career Counseling; *Career Development; *Counseling Effectiveness; Counseling Techniques; Counselor Client Relationship; *Cultural Awareness; Cultural Context; Cultural Pluralism; Elementary Secondary Education; Foreign Countries; Indigenous Populations; Interpersonal Communication; Racial Bias; School Counselors; Self Concept; Youth
IDENTIFIERS	Canada; ERIC Digests

ABSTRACT

The contextual considerations outlined in this digest provide a framework for career counseling with Canadian Native youth, a process which requires an unusually large range of cultural understanding and an appreciation of diversity and uniqueness. Counselors need to be aware of individual diversity within Native groups. Four Native "cultural-self" definitions presented are: (1) traditional; (2) assimilated; (3) transitional; and (4) bi-cultural, each of which have profound implications for the career counseling process. Ways in which dominant society schools impede the career development of Native youths are discussed, as well as reasons why training in multicultural counseling is inappropriate for those working with Native youth. Research suggests at least five ways in which career work with Native youth can reduce racism and dominant society suppression of Native identity and give Native youth a greater voice in the formulation of career conceptions which are sensible to them: (1) support for educating Natives as career counselors; (2) ensure that Native youth can access credible counselors; (3) restructure counselor education programs to include Native culture; (4) develop counseling programs tailored to the needs of Native youth; and (5) revise the basic process of career counseling for Native needs. (RB)

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Career Counseling with Native Clients: Understanding the Context: ERIC Digest.

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ERIC DIGEST

1995 EDO-CG-95-45

Career Counseling With Native Clients: Understanding The Context[1]

R. Vance Peavy

Overview

In order to discuss career development and counseling sensibly in relation to Native clients, it is necessary to state four contextual conditions:

1. There is no generic Native or "Indian." The term "Indian" is a "white" term. For Natives living traditional lives, there are many important clan, band, and tribal differences as well as complicated family politics--all of which influence career development and choice for Native individuals. Career counseling with Native clients requires an unusually large range of cultural understandings and an appreciation of diversity and uniqueness.

2. With regard to Native enculturation and self-identity, there are at least four Native "cultural-self" definitions, each having profound implications for career counseling.[2]

- A *"traditional"* Native supports and lives the traditional way of life through use of foods, medicines, social organization, ceremonies, and communication, and is happy with this way of life.
- An "assimilated" Native supports and lives the modern, dominant society way of life through use of foods, social organization, and communication and is happy with this way of life.
- A *"transitional"* Native identity fluctuates between traditional and dominant society, and often exhibits dysfunctional ways of living. The transitional individual is not committed to either culture and may be unhappy, uncertain, or unaware of his or her own lifestyle. He or she is often abusive, substance addicted, manifests low self-esteem and lack of personal stability.
- A *"bi-cultural"* Native person lives and supports both traditional and dominant society ways of living. The bi-cultural person uses both traditional and dominant society foods, medicines, and social organization, and may engage in both clan and nuclear family patterns. In contrast to the other identities, the bi-cultural individual has reconciled cultural differences and is at peace with reconciliation. If career counseling is to be at all effective, it must take these differing life-styles and identities into account.

3. Career development for Native youth is seriously impeded by two characteristics of dominant society schools:

- Lack of attention, understanding, and respect on the part of school personnel (including career counselors) toward the linguistic and cultural identities of Native students.
- Lack of structural support or "Native cultural presence" for students who are attempting to retain Native cultural identity. A counseling preoccupation with the "self" of Native students as a step toward career development is all too often assimilative and contributes to the creation of transitional, dysfunctional lifestyles. Though unintentional, career counselors perform a kind of colonization of the Native mind (Madsen, 1990) when they attribute importance and value to academic, social, and vocational values and tasks *as they understand them*. If career counseling and development is to make sense to Native students, ways must be found for Native students to find and use their own "cultural voices" in career exploration and to use their own life experiences as building blocks for a hopeful future.

4. Training in "multicultural counseling" is *not* an answer for providing sensible career counseling for Native clients for at least two reasons. First, Natives are not immigrants. Persons who come to North America as refugees and immigrants have an expectation, as does the dominant society, that in due time they will attain full membership in the North American dominant society. Their direction is clearly assimilative and contrasts absolutely with many Natives who struggle to preserve their historical, cultural identity as an "original" or "First Nations" people. Second, to "migrate" is to leave one culture and to re-establish oneself in another culture (Bissoondath, 1994). Most "First Nations" peoples are dedicated to retaining their Native cultural identity and, in many instances, interested in developing a bi-cultural

ability to navigate harmoniously back and forth between Native and dominant culture.

Directions For Career Counseling With Native Youth

Our research (Peavy, 1994) suggests at least five ways in which career work with Native youth can reduce racism and dominant society suppression of Native identity and give Native youth more voice in the formulation of career conceptions which are sensible to them:

- Provide financial and conceptual support for educating Natives as career counselors for Native youth. Native community leaders and elders should have a say in the composition of such training programs.
- Take steps in school programs to ensure that Native youth can receive career counseling from Native counselors, if they want it, or from non-Native counselors who have successfully established credibility and rapport with Native clients and with the larger Native community.
- Restructure counselor education programs to include courses in Native psychology, language, history and culture. Include "immersion" experiences in the Native community. At the very least, counselors of Native youth should have participated in Native community events and should have first-hand knowledge of the cultural protocols typical of the Native cultural groups.
- Develop career counseling programs to include experiences and materials tailored to the needs of Native youth; use suitable role models--for identity purposes and for career emulation.
- Revise the basic process of career counseling for Native needs. In contrast with formalized, self-focused counseling based on dominant society education and psychological principles, Native-appropriate counseling might employ, for example, narrative and story-telling as a central counseling procedure (Peavy, 1992). Storytelling is a good vehicle for rethinking one's "career identity" in relation to social, political, and economic realities, and can help counselors and clients find ways to reclaim identities as members of a respected cultural group. Further, storied counseling enables Native clients to explore ways to navigate through school and dominant culture.

Conclusion

The contextual consideration outlined in this paper provide a framework for career counseling with Native youth. It is a framework which links Native tradition, community, and culture to Native experience in dominant society schools and which helps Native youth construct a personal voice andidentity, yet, at the same time, learn to navigate school and majority cultural life. This framework suggests that a career counseling approach with Native clients can be constructed which respects Native culture and promotes ability and hope for bi-cultural navigation and career formation.

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Reference Notes

[1] For consistency, I use the term "Native" in this paper without prejudice to other terms, such as "Indian," "Aboriginal," "First Nations," and "Indigenous."

[2] I am indebted to Wedlidi Speck for these distinctions. Wedlidi Speck is a status Indian and member of the Nimpkish Band of the Kwakiutl Agency and is a traditional-based counselor.

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